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SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

IN WHICH THE VEXING QUESTION OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF HELL IS FINALLY SETTLED, TO THE SATISFACTION OF SOME; THE FINER POINTS OF HOSPITALITY; AND IN WHICH IT IS DEMONSTRATED THAT WHILE SOME MAY FALL, OTHERS ARE PUSHED.

the

SANDMAN™

SEASONS OF MISTS 6

gaiman jones giordano

"GOOD MORNING, PRETTY SISTER. OUR HOST HAS FINALLY SEEN FIT TO LET THE SUN RISE. A BRIGHT, NEW DAY HAS DAWNED."

I'M STILL *GLORIOUSLY* DRUNK ON THIS MAGNIFICENT WINE, AND ON A NIGHT ILL-SPENT WITH THIS LOVELY LAD.

HE'S WITH THE EGYPTIAN DELEGATION--A TEMPLE PRIEST OR A DEAD KING, OR SOMETHING.

ISN'T HE *GORGEOUS?*

SENEFERU, THIS IS MY SISTER, NUALA.

NUALA, MEET SENEFERU.

CLURACAN. GET OUT OF MY BED-CHAMBER.

AH, NOW, AND WE'VE ONLY COME BY TO TELL YOU THAT LORD SHAPER IS ABOUT TO ANNOUNCE WHAT HE'S PLANNING TO DO WITH HIS NEW REALM.

SO GET A FROCK ON, LITTLE SISTER, AND COME AND HEAR THE GOOD WORD.

DO YOU THINK HE *WILL* ACCEDE TO OUR WISHES? THAT HE'LL KEEP HELL *EMPTY*, AND FORGIVE US THE TITHE?

NOT A *HOPE*. THERE'S TOO MANY BIG BOYS LEANING ON HIM--YOU SAW THEM ALL LAST NIGHT.

PERSONALLY, I FIGURE THE BEST I CAN HOPE TO GET OUT OF THESE SHENANIGANS IS EXCELLENT WINE, AND GREAT SEX.

SEE YOU DOWN THERE.

CONVERSION BY WILDSTORM

AND ALL I GET OUT OF IT IS A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP, I SUPPOSE.

OH WELL.

GIVE US THE HELL OF LUCIFER, THEN HE LAST

IF IT CAME TO *THAT*, I WOULD SIMPLY HAVE TO ADMIT THAT I DID NOT KNOW *EXACTLY* WHERE HIS BROTHER IS *NOW*. BUT I *DO* POSSESS CERTAIN FACTS...

WE MUST HOPE THEY ARE ENOUGH FOR THE DREAM LORD, OTHERWISE--

...SURPRISED NOT TO SEE A REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE GREEK GODS HERE. PERHAPS *THEY* KNOW SOMETHING MY PEOPLE DO NOT.

IT'S ALL INTERNAL POLITICS, OLD FRIEND. IT LEAVES NO ROOM FOR TRAVEL. BUT IF YOU ASK ME--

...WHAT IF IT ISN'T *ENOUGH?* A SMALL FRAGMENT OF HIS SOUL?

OHH, I SHOULD HAVE *DISGUISED* MYSELF, SWINDLED THE HELL OF LUCIFER FROM DREAM AS I SWINDLED KVASIR'S BLOOD FROM THE DWARVES.

PLEASE... ODIN VERATYR... SPEAK... MORE... QUIETLY...

HELLO, FAIRY WOMAN. WHAT ARE *YOU* DOING AFTER THE MAIN EVENT?

MY NAME'S LOKI.

TRICKSTER...

FOR THE *LAST* TIME... YOU ARE *ONLY* PERMITTED TO TALK TO ME, OR TO LORD ODIN. OR ELSE I'LL SPLINTER EVERY BONE IN YOUR BODY WITH MY BARE HANDS.

YOU ARE *NOT* TRUSTED.

AND I'M IN A REALLY *FOUL* MOOD THIS MORNING.

NUALA-- COME IN. EVERYBODY'S HERE...

Season of Mists
Chapter ≈6

In which the vexing question of the sovereignty of Hell is finally settled, to the satisfaction of some; the finer points of hospitality; and in which it is demonstrated that while some may fall, others are pushed.

--AND I *DO* MEAN EVERYBODY.

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the SANDMAN

Featuring characters created by Gaiman, Kieth & Pringenberg

MRR. WELL?
WHERE IS HE?
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU HAVEN'T SLEPT A WINK ALL NIGHT.
I don't sleep, Matthew.
I DIDN'T SAY YOU DID. I JUST SAID THAT WAS WHAT YOU LOOKED LIKE.
BUSY NIGHT, HUH?
Yes. I spent the first half of it talking with a few of our visitors.
I spent the second half... thinking.
They all want it; I don't. I never thought that disposing of the unwanted could be so hard.
Everything keeps shifting and changing, Matthew. It's like treading a path through mist.
Dream?

Leave us, Matthew.

Remiel, Duma.

How goes your observation.

It goes. We have observed much, and have reported all we have seen to our Creator. Have you reached a decision?

I... I have come to no decision, Angel. Many of them have offered me things I want, or need. It is hard...

Perhaps I should accede to the Fairies' wishes and leave Hell empty. It serves no good purpose...

I have a message for you.

Very well, Remiel. What is it?

I do not know.

Wait.

We...it will relay the message. It is from my Creator...

There must be a Hell.

There must be a place for the demons; a place for the damned.

Hell is Heaven's reflection. It is Heaven's shadow. They define each other. Reward and Punishment; hope and despair.

There must be a Hell, for without Hell, Heaven has no meaning.

And thus Hell must be--

NO!

No! He cannot wish that! That is wrong...

We have done nothing to offend the Name-- nothing that would warrant this...

What is it, Remiel? What are you saying?

I am saying... I have been told to say...

...that Hell cannot be entrusted to other than those who serve the Name directly. It is too important.

That myself, and Duma, are to take over Hell.

That it will be under our control, as representatives of The Name.

And...that we can never return to the Silver City. We can never again enter the Presence.

But--this is neither fair nor just. We have done nothing to be cast out. We have never rebelled--we fought bravely, side by side, against the armies of Lucifer. We are of the Host.

Does He not understand what this means?

To be exiled into the darkness? To be Banished from our Creator's Light, his grace? We are too pure for our feet ever to touch the base clay--why then should we be forced into the Pit?

This is...this is wrong. We can not... We must not...

Hell is for the Evil. Hell is for those who have offended against his love. Hell is for...

I--I will rebel. Like Lucifer. I will protest. This is wrong...

But--how can I rebel? Where could I go if I did?

Lord?

Let this burden pass from me. Your will is too harsh. Choose another...

If you want it, Duma, it is yours.

And you, Remiel. What will you do?

What can I do? I cannot allow my fellow to drink from the cup that I have refused.

I will go with Duma. I will go to Hell.

Very well. You have my sympathies.

Let us tell the others.

...SO I SAID TO HER, "I AM THOR!"

SHE SAID, "YOU'RE THOR? I'M THO THORE I CAN HARDLY PITH!"

HAHAHAHAHAHA!

IT WAS A JOKE.

NIDDHOG CORPSE-SUCKER, BUT I FEEL TERRIBLE.

IF YOU DON'T HOLD YOUR STUPID TONGUE, THUNDER-GOD, THEN...

THEN ONCE I RULE HELL I SHALL NOT REST UNTIL YOUR TONGUE HANGS FROM A HOOK ON THE WALL OF MY THRONE-ROOM.

YOU? RULE HELL? THE HELL OF LUCIFER WILL BE OURS, AZAZEL. AND YOU AND YOUR KIND WILL BE LEFT TO SNUFFLE IN THE OUTER DARKNESS, LIKE GHOULS VAINLY SEARCHING FOR A BURIED TOMB IN THE DESERT SANDS.

HELL IS MINE, DOG-HEAD, AND ALL OF YOU WILL SUFFER FOR YOUR TEMERITY...

I had assumed that you would wait for me to make an announcement, before electing yourselves Lords of Hell.

I see I was wrong.

Thank you for waiting.

I apologize for the delay. But then, I am sure none of you would have wished me to rush into a decision.

Order and Chaos, Egypt and Asgard, Faerie, Demonkind and Nippon -- each of you has come to me, each of you has asked for a favor...

ENOUGH *BABBLING*, DREAMER! GIVE ME THE KEY TO HELL AND BE DONE WITH IT...

Give you the key to Hell?

I cannot do that. I cannot give it to any of you.

WHAT?

YESS!

WHY NOT?

Because it is no longer his to dispose of.

We have taken back the Key.

Hell will again be the abode of the damned, and the demons.

The damned will be returned to Hell; and there they will once again be punished.

The demons may once more take up residence in Hell, and will be expected to play their part in the rehabilitation of the damned.

The War between Heaven and Hell is over.

Hell is now directly under Heaven's control, and Duma and I will be Heaven's regents in the Underworld...

ON WHOSE AUTHORITY?

Whose do you think?

DREAMLORD-- YOU ARE NOT FORCED TO ACCEDE TO THIS.

I did not create the Hell of Lucifer, Lord Susano-o-No-Mikoto, nor the realm of which it is a shadow. If its creator wishes to take it back, that is its creator's affair, not mine.

I thank you all for coming here; and I trust that, although you may be disappointed by my decision, you will understand it.

I hope it will cause none of you undue distress.

CAUSE *US* DISTRESS? OHH, *THAT'S* A FINE ONE, MORPHEUS. WHAT ABOUT THE DISTRESS IT'S GOING TO CAUSE *YOU*?

I KNOW YOUR RULES. YOU OFFERED US *HOSPITALITY* WHEN WE ARRIVED.

YOU CAN DO *NOTHING* NOW TO HARM *ANY* OF US.

I WILL LEAVE HERE AS I CAME... AND NADA, YOUR LITTLE HUMAN SWEETHEART, WILL LEAVE HERE *WITH* ME.

I *SAID* I WOULD DEVOUR HER SOUL. AND I *WILL*.

SLOWLY, THOUGH. A BITE AT A TIME. AND WITH EVERY BITE I WILL BE THINKING OF YOU.

Oh, Azazel.

I offered hospitality to all my visitors.

That includes both those I knew about, and those I did not. Yes, you have my hospitality, and are under my protection. But so is Choronzon.

And so is Nada.

And I will not see them hurt.

IF YOU *WANT* HER, DREAM-SQUATTER, THEN COME AND *GET* HER--*IF* YOU'VE GOT THE BALLS.

I RENOUNCE YOUR HOSPITALITY.

Very Well.

I DID NOT... *BELIEVE*... YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO ENTER INTO US... DREAMER.

But I did, Azazel.

YES. *YES*, YOU DID. VERY WELL. FIND THEM, AND RELEASE THEM, AND THEY ARE YOURS, AND YOU MAY LEAVE ME FREELY.

FAIL AND I WILL *FEAST* ON THEIR *SOULS*-- AND ON *YOURS*.

I understand.

DO YOU? *REALLY*?

THEN FIND THEM, IF YOU CAN.

Very well.

OH. IT'S YOU.
AZAZEL SAID IT PLANNED TO GIVE ME TO YOU, FOR YOU TO TORTURE.
I PRAYED THAT IT WAS LYING, AS IT OFTEN DOES. BUT THEN, I WAS WRONG -- AS I OFTEN AM.
Yes. You are.

I am not here to torture you, Choronzon.
Take my hand

That's one of them, Azazel.
INDEED.

YOU?

I have come to free you, Nada. Touch my hand.

YOU HAVE COME TO FREE ME? AFTER ALL THIS TIME?

KAI'CKUL... I HAD GIVEN UP...

Please, Nada. We have no time to talk. Just touch my hand...

Azazel? I have freed them both.

INDEED.

I SAID THAT YOU COULD LEAVE, IF YOU FREED THEM, DID I NOT?

Yes... you did...

I LIED.

YOU'RE MINE NOW, DREAMLORD. MINE TO CONSUME AT MY LEISURE.

AND WHEN I'VE EATEN YOUR SOUL...

YOUR...

Azazel?

...WHERE ARE YOU?

It was unwise of you to attempt to harm me, Azazel. Elsewhere, perhaps, but not here.

This is my home, Azazel; my place of power. This is the Heart of the Dreaming.

Reality here conforms to my wishes; it is what I wish it to be-- no more, no less.

You have displeased me, Azazel. And in light of your actions, it was extremely unwise of you to reject my hospitality.

I trust that this will teach you better manners, little demon.

Now: does anyone else in this place have a problem with my decision?

Good.

I will see each of you in the outer lobby, then. To say goodbye.

DREAM,

YOUR DECISION WAS JUST AND ORDERLY. AS SUCH, THOUGH I REGRET IT, I CANNOT FAULT IT.

KILDERKIN

Thank you, Lord Kilderkin. Your understanding is appreciated. I wish you well.

HMMPH. *WE* IS *ALWAYS* MORE FUN THAN THE *ORDER* PEOPLE. *CARDBOARD BOXES!*

NOBODY *CLEVER* BE'S *CARDBOARD* BOXES.

So: I take it that I have incurred the wrath of Chaos, from now until the end of time." From the Shivering Brigade to the Laughing Dancers."

RE-ALLY?

OH, *THAT.* I JUS' *MADE* THAT *STUFF* UP. *WE* DIN'T WANT IT, WE JUS' DIN'T WANT ANYONE *ELSE* TO GET IT.

ANYWAY, THANK-YOU-FOR-HAVING-ME-AT-YOUR-PARTY, MISTER DREAMY.

I HAD A *LOVELY* TIME.

Choronzon. Mother of Spiders. Where do you go now?

THERE IS A LINE ALREADY FORMING OUTSIDE THE GATES OF HELL. WE WILL JOIN IT. AND WHEN THE GATES ARE OPENED WE WILL ENTER.

MORPHEUS...

LORD AZAZEL... WHAT WILL YOU *DO* WITH HIM? WHAT WILL YOU *DO TO* HIM?

Do to him? Nothing. I shall merely give him time to reflect, and the opportunity to mend his manners. I expect I shall eventually let him out. Eventually.

WE WILL RETURN TO OUR OWN LAND, THEN, DREAM-KING.

NICE MEETING YOU.

I AM SORRY WE WERE UNABLE TO COME TO AN AGREEMENT, OLD FRIEND.

My brother desires privacy, Lady Bast, and I am prepared to respect that desire.

IT IS WELL.

BUT IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND, THEN COME TO ME, AND WE CAN TALK FURTHER.

Lord Odin. I regret that I was forced to reject your offer.

AYE-- YOU'RE SORRY. HMPH. WELL, YOU ARE STILL WELCOME IN MY HALL OF GLADSHEIM, SHAPER.

MY HOUSE IS YOURS, AND MY MEAD AND MEAT ARE AT YOUR DISPOSAL.

I appreciate that, Odin All-father. Fare you well; and you, too, Thor. I trust you enjoyed yourself.

I... I HOPE I WAS NOT TOO BOISTEROUS LAST NIGHT, LORD. I AM A BLUFF, ROUGH-AND-READY, TAKE-ME-AS-YOU-FIND-ME DEITY, AND NOT ONE FOR AIRS AND GRACES.

I had noticed.

And Loki. Will he not say goodbye?

THE TRICKSTER SEEMS UNWILLING TO RETURN TO ASGARD, SHAPER.

NO! YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND! THIS IS WRONG--

I'VE BEEN WANTING TO DO THAT FOR *TWELVE HUNDRED YEARS.*

THERE. TRICK YOUR WAY OUT OF *THAT,* TRICKSTER.

TIME TO GO BACK IN YOUR *HOLE...*

BOSS?

Yes, Matthew?

UH, LORD CLURACAN OF FAERIE, AND LORD SUSAN THINGIE, THE JAPANESE GUY, HAVE *BOTH* ASKED IF THEY CAN STAY AN EXTRA *DAY.* I *THINK* THEY WANT TO TALK TO YOU SOME MORE. IS THAT *OKAY?*

Yes. Tell the servants to see that they are fed and cared for. I will talk to them later.

NO PROBLEM.

WELL, HOW DOES IT FEEL *NOT* TO HAVE THE KEY TO HELL *ANY MORE?*

It feels... like a great weight has been taken from my shoulders, Matthew.

It is an evil thing, that key. It corrupts, by simply existing. I am well rid of it.

WELL, IT'S A GOOD THING IT WENT TO THOSE ANGELS, THEN. I MEAN, THEY WON'T BE CORRUPTED BY IT, WILL THEY?

I am going to my quarters, Matthew. I have one final task for you, and then you may return to Eve's cave.

SURE.

Go to the woman, Nada. I have assigned the fashion thing to groom and tend her. They are in the East Wing.

Tell her that I request her company, for dinner, tonight...

Tell her that we need to talk.

RIGHT. I'LL TELL HER YOU WANT TO TALK TO HER.

I don't WANT to talk to her, Matthew.

I doubt that she wants to talk to me.

But still...

...We will talk.

To Be Concluded

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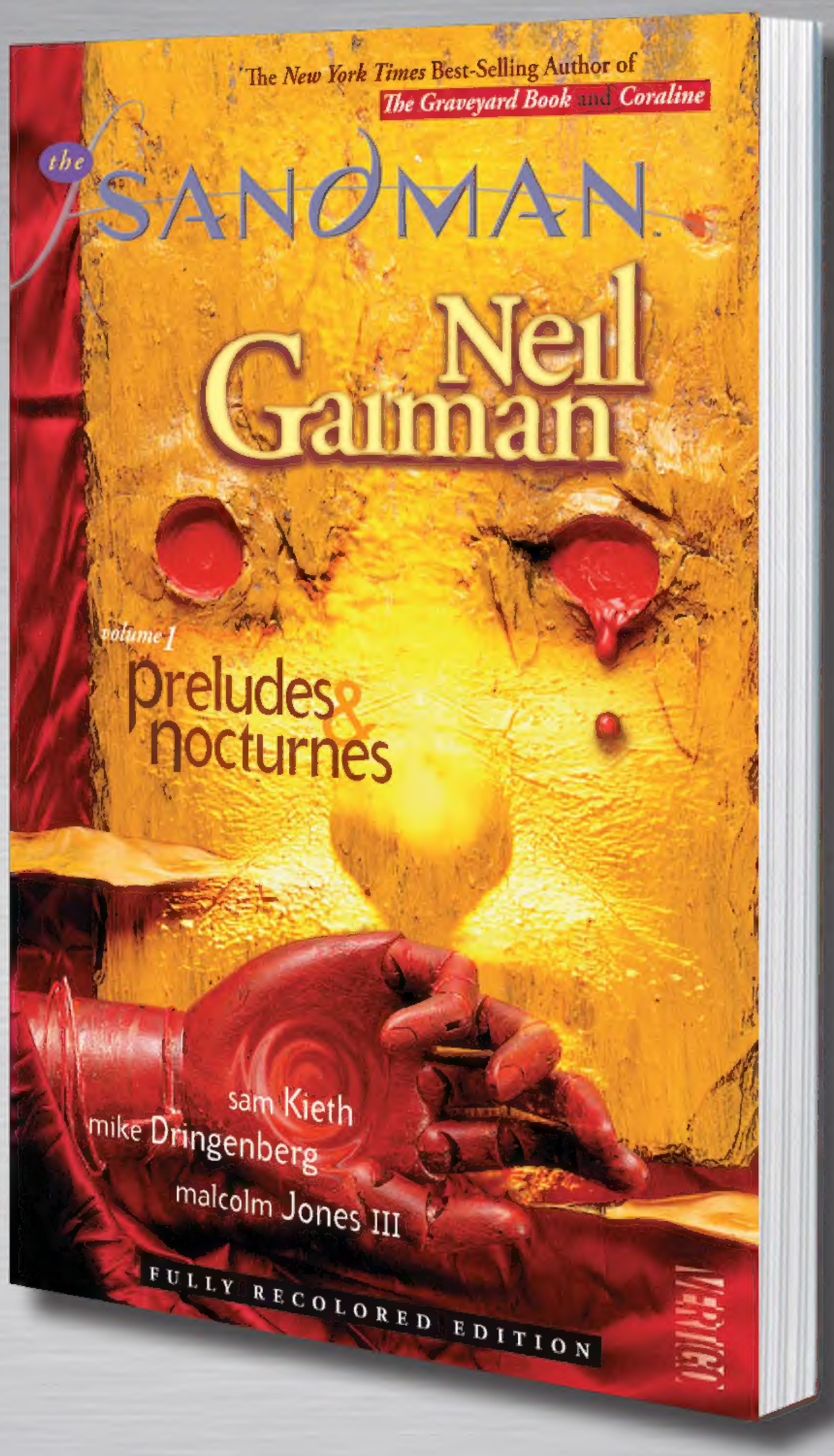

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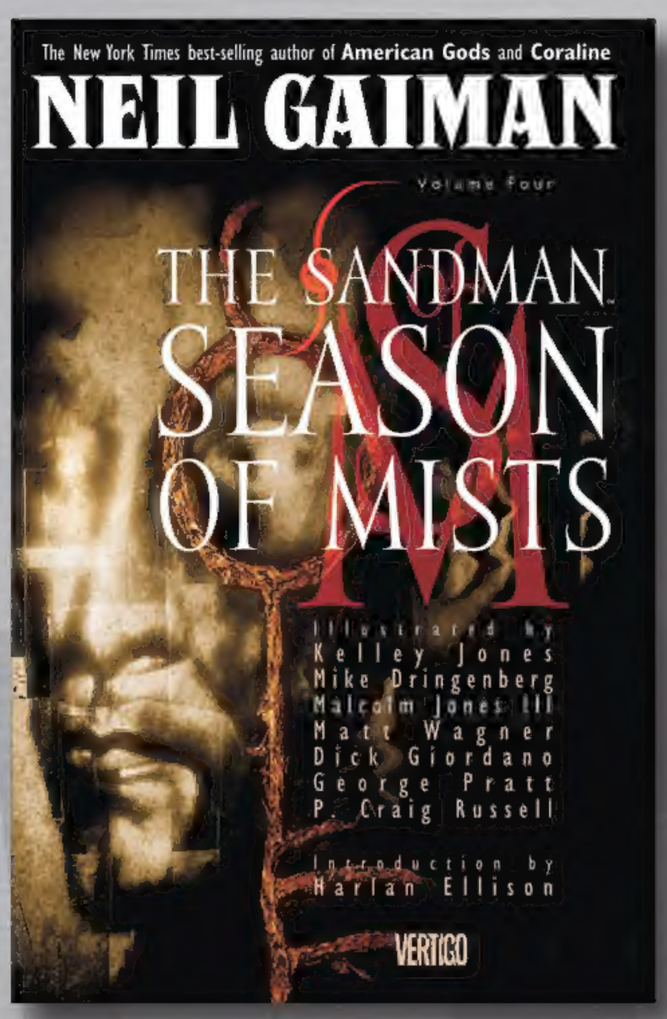

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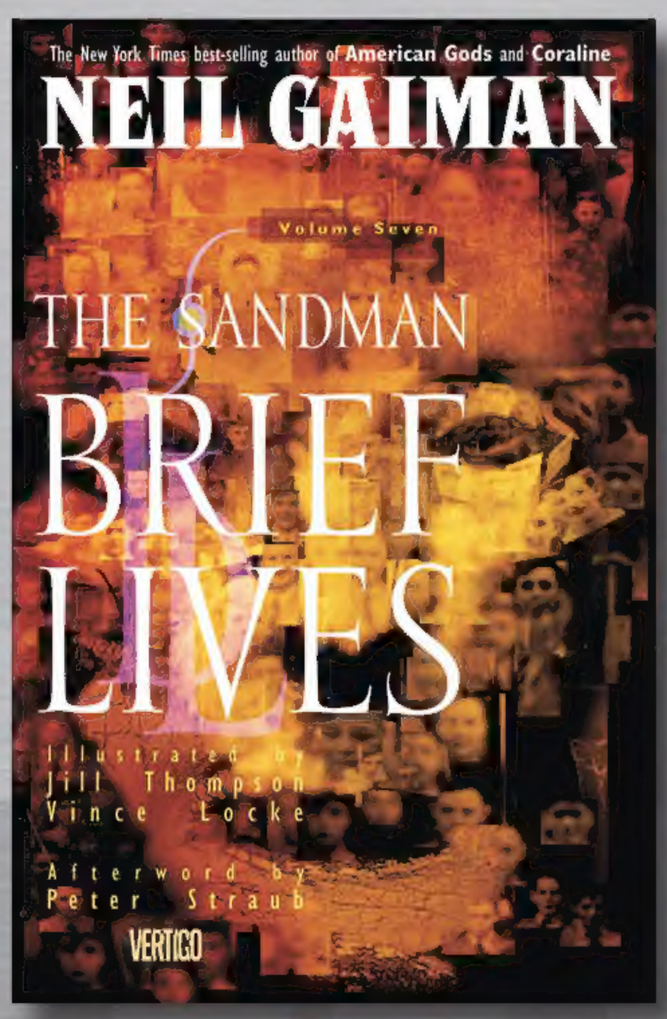

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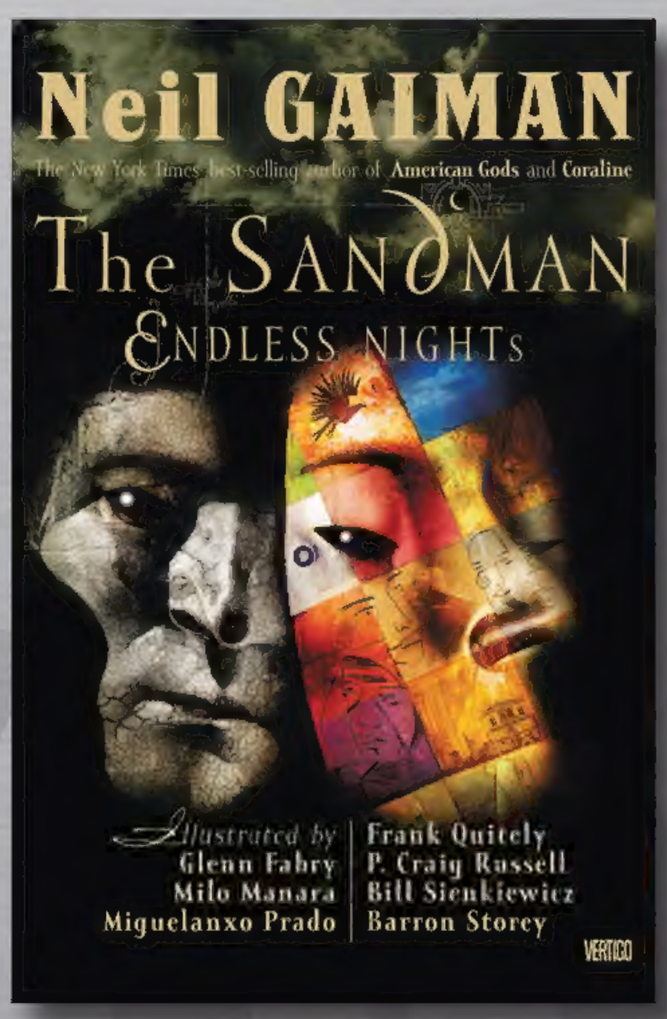

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